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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003276

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IT](#) [ITALY](#) [NATIONAL ELECTIONS](#) [ITALIAN POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY: SENATE PRESIDENT PERA WORRIED ABOUT  
BERLUSCONI'S ELECTION PROSPECTS AND THE CENTER-LEFT'S  
FOREIGN POLICY

REF: A. ROME 3081

[1](#)B. STATE 180461

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Spogli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador met September 28 with Senate President Marcello Pera at Pera's request. Pera was pessimistic about PM Silvio Berlusconi's ability to win next year's general elections, but believes there "is still time" to pull off a victory. He criticized Berlusconi's failure to develop concrete plans, described coalition problems stemming from the debate over center-right leadership, and said the Catholic Church would play an important role in next year's elections. Pera said a center-left victory would be disastrous for U.S. foreign policy interests; a view we believe is overstated. Pera hopes to visit the U.S. again in January. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador met September 28 with Senate President Marcello Pera, at Pera's request. Pera expressed appreciation for the high-level reception he received during his recent trip to Washington and said that it is a sign of the closeness of the current U.S.-Italian bilateral relationship. Pera, a close ally of PM Silvio Berlusconi, told the Ambassador he is pessimistic regarding next year's general election but said there "is still time" for the governing center-right coalition to achieve a victory. However, he said he is concerned Berlusconi believes too much in "miracles" and in his own charisma and that Berlusconi does not understand the need to deliver concrete programs. Pera described Berlusconi's succession problem: both National Alliance (AN) leader Gianfranco Fini and Union of Christian Democrats of the Center (UDC) leader Pier Ferdinando Casini aspire to replace Berlusconi and are jockeying for position hurting coalition unity. According to Pera, Berlusconi needs to find a way to tell Fini he is next in line while reassuring Casini that his time will come.

[1](#)3. (C) Pera stated "values" will play an important role in the upcoming elections and said the Catholic Church will figure significantly into the political debate. He noted, as an example, that the Church has already inserted itself actively into the recent debate over civil unions for homosexuals. Pera, who co-wrote a book with Pope Benedict XVI when he was still Cardinal Ratzinger, told the Ambassador he has already met twice with the new Pope.

[1](#)4. (C) In Pera's view, a future center-left government led by Romano Prodi would be beholden to far left politician Fausto Bertinotti--leading to disastrous foreign policy decisions. He said he is "worried" Prodi would go too far to accommodate Bertinotti in order to keep his government from falling.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Finally, Pera said he would like to visit the U.S. again in January 2006 and suggested he would like to travel to the west coast. The Ambassador offered to assist in arranging meetings at the Hoover Institute and with California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

6, (C) COMMENT: Pera, a relative neophyte in politics despite his high position in government, is often pessimistic and somewhat melodramatic. He is growing increasingly concerned that Berlusconi will fail to rally Italians in next year's elections and paints a more starkly negative picture of a potential center-left government's foreign policy than we believe is warranted. In this meeting, Pera seemed to be hoping in vain the Ambassador would ask what the U.S. could do to prevent a center-left victory. END COMMENT.  
SPOGLI

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